

Ben Barka Trial Reaches to High Places

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PARIS, Sept. 9—The mysterious and sinister Ben Barka trial briefly touched the highest office in France this week, Gaulle's personal staff.

But a judicial striptease has been unfolding in the Court of Assizes here. The most provocative glimpses hinting at top-level involvement in the kidnaping of Medhi Ben Barka have been of very short duration.

This first week's testimony in a trial likely to run for a month was chiefly devoted to recounting a familiar script. Ben Barka, a left-wing opposition leader in Morocco, was snatched from the heart of Paris last October by a strange combination of French police, a French secret agent and French gangsters.

According to the authorities

here, the whole plot was masterminded by Mohammed Oufkir, Morocco's Minister of the Interior. Ben Barka was allegedly turned over to Oufkir and his henchmen, who supposedly knifed him slowly to death.

The week's most evocative line was "Foccart est au parfum," Foccart's in the know. Its subject, Jacques Foccart, is secretary general of President de Gaulle's staff for African affairs and reportedly once headed a secret presidential police net.

His name was dropped in testimony by Louis Souchon, a red-faced and beefy morals squad detective. Souchon swore he took part in Ben Barka's abduction with the assurance that Foccart was covering him.

The assurance came from Antoine Lopez, a thin-faced,

sallow agent of the French counterespionage service. Lopez, nicknamed "Savonette" or Little Soap, squirmed, denied and then finally admitted he had said that Foccart's in the know.

But whether or not this assurance was false remains a mystery. Lopez did testify that all counterespionage reports must be sought. But the ports wind up on Foccart's desk, but he was not pressed closely on the point.

The long sessions in the crowded and stuffy courtroom have at least established one point: if its officials can be believed, the French counterespionage agency is much too sloppy ever to give the Central Intelligence Agency much of a run. Reports disappear, messages are not transmitted. Only "honorable agents" are employed, but somehow they have underworld friends.

The highest figure on trial here is Marcel le Roy, heavy-set, elegantly dressed, articulate and clearly used to authority. Until his arrest, he was a ranking official in the counterspy service.

Unlike his five handcuffed codefendants who are charged with kidnaping, le Roy comes and goes freely. He is accused only of failing to denounce a crime.

Le Roy conceded that Lopez, his "honorable agent" had told him in advance of a Moroccan plan to "recover" Ben Barka by "unorthodox means." As Lopez put it, the Moroccans wanted Ben Barka so badly they "would have put Brigitte Bardot in his bed." Le Roy duly filed a report on this, but somehow, he said, it was ignored or disappeared.

Less than three weeks before Ben Barka was seized, le Roy was informed that the plot was coming up to an ugly climax. But since the information came from a man le Roy regarded as crazy, he testified, he didn't pass it on.

Some political "parfum" (which translates literally as perfume smell or flavor) was added to the case today when

accepted a role as defense counsel for Lopez. He was the right-wing candidate against de Gaulle in the last presidential election.

Le Monde, the most important newspaper here, is saying Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour

tonight that all this "demands that the highest persons who protected this criminal operation must be sought." But the prevailing view here is that many of the central questions in the Ben Barka affair will never be answered.